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**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY AT THE HEAD START  
ENROLLMENT CEREMONY**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

I thank Speaker Pelosi and commend her for leadership and for having this ceremony.

I am proud that this Congress has made education a priority. Education is central to our economy and central to our nation's future. In the 21st century, students don't compete only with their peers in the neighboring county or state. American students are competing with students in Europe and Asia and all around the world.

In this Congress, we haven't just tried to tackle one small segment of education policy. We've looked at education as a continuum, and we've enacted policies to create a seamless web – from early education, with this Head Start bill, to improving math and science education with the America Competes Act, to higher education, with the student aid bill we passed and the president signed earlier this year.

Nothing is more important to that continuum and to creating opportunities than ensuring a high-quality early education for all children.

With this Head Start bill, we're reaching out early to make greater opportunities available for thousands of our neediest children. We're providing a fairer chance for very young children to grow up healthy and safe, graduate from high school, go on to school and college, and achieve the American dream.

Head Start currently serves nearly one million young children and their families. The reauthorization commits an additional 900 million dollars to serve up to 125,000 more children over the next few years.

Head Start's mission began in 1964, when Congress launched the War on Poverty and made a new national commitment to prepare our neediest children for kindergarten and first grade. We recognized that a comprehensive approach was needed, with preschool at the center, and with major emphasis on health and parent involvement, as well.

This reauthorization is true to Head Start's original mission, and does more than ever to strengthen and expand the program, and see an even greater course for its future.

- With this bill, we upgrade the educational aspects of Head Start, and encourage greater partnerships between programs and local schools, so that children have the skills and support they'll need to succeed in the early grades.

- We enhance Head Start's quality, provide funding for Head Start Centers to keep pace with inflation and rising program costs, and dedicate 40 percent of new funds to upgrading services and retaining the Head Start workforce.
- We also dedicate greater resources to training Head Start teachers and staff and continuing their education. We set specific goals for the skills of Head Start teachers, because the learning and development of young children depends so heavily on it.
- We also expand Early Head Start, to include 8,000 more infants and toddlers over the next five years. We enhance services for English language learners and homeless children. And we make a long-overdue commitment to expanding Head Start in Indian country and immigrant communities.
- We allow greater flexibility for programs and we finally terminate the flawed National Reporting System. Head Start will now be informed by the best science and research on early childhood development and learning.

We know that the first five years of life make an immense difference for a child. Approximately 69 percent of 4 year-olds participate in child care, preschool, or Head Start. Over 60 percent of young children are cared for by someone other than their parents. Every one of them – regardless of their background or the setting in which they are served – deserves the best possible early learning program.

Our legislation builds on the progress made in many states to establish a good early education system – a full curriculum, standards for early learning, and a stable, well-qualified early education workforce.

Under the bill each state will designate an Early Childhood Advisory Council to examine the needs of its early childhood programs and develop a plan to improve professional development, upgrade standards, enhance collaboration among programs, and improve data collection. We'll dedicate new funding to meet the challenge of implementing these needed improvements in early education.

As in elementary and secondary education, the reforms in this reauthorization will need resources, too.

On a bipartisan basis, the conferees have made a commitment to invest more in our youngest children and help Head Start respond more effectively to the changing and evolving needs of the communities it serves. The program is currently funded at \$7 billion, and will increase an additional \$900 million by the fifth year under our bill.

This reauthorization keeps Head Start on its successful path, and enables it to continue to thrive and improve.

I commend everyone here today for their impressive work over the past five years to make this legislation possible. We still haven't won the war on poverty in America. But thanks to you, we're getting closer, day by day, one child at a time.

Thank you very much.

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